

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th June 2013**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman in the Chair);

Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Bennett, Davison, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Miss Martin, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Smith, Yeo.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Burgess, Feacey, Hodgkinson.

Also Present:

Cllr. Galpin.

Head of Personnel and Development, Policy Manager, Principal Policy Planner, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

49 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Davison	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of the Conningbrook Working Group.	53
Mrs Martin	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of the Conningbrook Working Group.	53
Mortimer	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of the Conningbrook Working Group.	53
Smith	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of the Conningbrook Working Group.	53
Yeo	Announced an 'Other Interest' as a Member of the Conningbrook Working Group.	53

50 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 21st May 2013 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

51 Sickness Absence 2012/13

The Head of Personnel and Development introduced the item. She advised the Committee that the report was an annual report detailing the sickness and absenteeism data for employees of the Council for the year 2012/13. The total days lost over this period were 7.03 days per Full Time Employee (FTE). This was an increase on the previous year's figure of 5 days per FTE. Whilst this increase may initially cause some concern, it should be noted that there had been a national increase in both influenza and the norovirus during the winter months. She drew Members' attention to the reasons for sickness and the data for long term sickness and absence. The financial cost of sickness was highlighted which included the cost of overtime and agency workers. Comparative data for neighbouring Authorities was also provided in the report. The Council also operated an Employee Assistance programme.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

- There were concerns over the number of staff who had been off work on long-term sickness with stress. Members questioned whether the employees affected were from one particular service? They also questioned whether the cause of the stress was work related or if it was resulting from issues at home. The Head of Personnel and Development advised that they looked carefully at the causes of long-term sickness. Those employees absent due to stress were not limited to one Department, and there had been no trends identified. The majority of cases of stress were caused by factors at home, although there had been some instances of work related stress.
- Members requested that the Head of Personnel and Development contacted Gravesham Council to see how they had achieved such a low figure in relation to days off sick per FTE. The Head of Personnel and Development advised that there were changes afoot at Gravesham and it may be that there was an element of under reporting; however she would contact her counterpart to see how this figure had been achieved.
- In response to questions from Members the Head of Personnel and Development advised that the Council employed 368.91 FTE. The Council took its responsibility towards its employees seriously. In the event an employee was signed off due to stress they would be provided with support through the Active Care Service from the first day of their absence. Allegations of workplace bullying were dealt with through the Council's bullying and harassment policy. There had only been one reported case of bullying during the previous 12 months, this had not been upheld.

- Members raised concerns regarding the number of days employees could be off sick before having to provide a doctor's certificate. The Head of Personnel and Development advised that the Council followed Government guidance and legislation in relation to self certification and doctor's certificates. Employees could self certify for the first seven consecutive days of an illness, after this time they would need to provide a doctor's certificate. Requests for a doctor's certificate made during the first seven days of illness would result in a charge being levied by the issuing Doctor. If there were concerns regarding a short term absence for an employee the Council could insist on a doctor's certificate, the cost of which would be reimbursed by the Council.
- The Head of Personnel and Development stated that the Council had a written procedure for dealing with persistent short term absence. Cases were dealt with on a case by case basis. She explained that two of the Team were fully CIPD qualified, with another two partly CIPD qualified. The whole of the Team were able to provide advice to employees and managers, however only those with full CIPD qualifications provided advice on complex matters.
- Managers had been invited to attend training sessions on performance and sickness management during the past year. This had provided managers with improved capability for dealing with these issues. A new HR system had been rolled out across the Council at the beginning of the financial year; this ensured that managers had easy access to sickness and absence records. Improvements had also been made to the way 'return to work discussions' were carried out, this was something that may have been overlooked previously. Quarterly statistics were received from Health Assured; the provider of the Council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), this service was well used. Referrals to Occupational Health were monitored by the HR Team as referrals were made by the Council rather than through the EAP.

Members felt that there was no need for such a detailed report to be put before the Committee next year, unless there had been a significant change in the figures. It was also suggested that a graph be included in the report to show trends over the past four to five years.

Resolved:

- That (i) An information report be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on annual basis to include a graph to show trends over a four to five year period, if there were any significant changes in the figures then a full report would be welcomed.**
- (ii) The report be received and noted.**

52 Communication and Consultation Strategy for the Core Strategy Review

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair reminded the Committee that this report dealt with the communication and consultation strategy for the Core Strategy Review. The Core Strategy Review itself was not relevant to this Meeting.

The Policy Manager introduced the report and highlighted the challenges faced in plan making. It was apparent that reaction to planning applications was more significant than to plan making. Plan making was usually for a longer period of time and there was always the possibility that development may not happen. When site specific allocations were being considered this needed to be communicated to residents and it was vital that a range of methods were used and people were encouraged to get involved at an early stage rather than waiting until a planning application had been submitted.

The Principal Policy Planner advised Members that they had started the Core Strategy Review consultation process using an awarding winning model developed by Winchester City Council. 'Plan-It Ashford' encouraged all communities to think about their future needs and the needs of others. To date 26 sessions had been carried out with Parish Councils, Community Forums and Community Groups. These sessions had enabled groups to discuss issues pertinent to them, what they liked or disliked about development in the Borough and how they saw Ashford developing in the future. The process had been well received. This was just the first stage in the process; they would continue to consult with the community during each stage.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

- The Policy Manager advised that the Duty to Co-operate legislation had been bought in to ensure that Councils consulted with neighbouring Authorities during the plan making process to ensure that plans were cohesive and that Authorities did not operate in isolation from each other. Ashford had a good track record of consulting with neighbouring Authorities throughout the plan making process.
- Members questioned how involved Parish Councils had been in the process, had there been any that had not been forthcoming? The Policy Manager advised that involvement in the process was voluntary and drew attention to appendix 1 of the report which detailed all those groups that had taken part in the process.
- When site specific allocations were proposed this invariably indicated to residents that there was a possibility that something may happen. The communications strategy at this stage was vital. There would be difficult decisions to make at the site allocation stage and ensuring that all of the necessary information was available was important. During the plan making process for the Urban Sites Development Plan Document (DPD) a number of events had taken place during the consultation process and it had become apparent that there was a lot of local feeling regarding two of the proposed site allocations, which resulted in neither site being included within the DPD.
- A Member suggested that a plan be produced and be made available for residents to view that showed the borough as it was, as it is now and how it could look in the future. The Policy Manager said they were always looking for new and innovative ways of communicating and consulting with residents and he encouraged Members to put forward ideas.

- A Member felt that the questions posed through 'Plan-It Ashford' were leading and it was not an easy system to use. The Policy Manager advised that they had not received feedback of that nature to date; in fact feedback had been positive. The questions provided respondents with an opportunity to say what they would like to happen in the Borough.
- Members were disappointed that the Portfolio Holder had not attended the meeting to support the report. The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that he would speak to the Chairman regarding this and look at ways of encouraging Portfolio Holders to attend Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

53 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised Members' of the recent meeting between the Chairman of the Committee and the Chairman of the Audit Committee regarding the respective committees' roles in supporting the Council's strategic objectives.

At the Meeting of the Council on 16th May 2013 it had been agreed that the Committee would review the Energy Saving Budget and proposal for the Civic Centre (to improve lighting in the Civic Centre), this had been added to the future reviews and report tracker.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised the Committee that a number of items had been put forward for inclusion on the future reviews and report tracker. He suggested that the Committee considered each proposed review individually, and highlighted the Chairman's recommendation for each review.

KCC Shared Space Contract

The Member who proposed the review be included on the tracker advised Members that he felt that there were fundamental questions that needed to be answered following the completion of the contract. The contract had gone significantly over budget with a number of errors having been made. He felt it was vital to review the process as the maintenance of the Shared Space would be shortly handed over to the Borough Council.

A Member felt that the review being undertaken on behalf of KCC should be received prior to the Committee reviewing the matter.

The Member who suggested the review proposed that the review be added to the tracker and the review take place after the receipt of the results of the AMEY report on the Shared Space. This was seconded.

Drover's Roundabout

Members felt that they should wait until the update report was received in September before including this on the tracker.

Sevington Development Project

The Member who proposed the review be included on the tracker advised why he had requested the review take place, however he wished to amend his proposal and requested that the capacity at Junction 10 be reviewed with a revised South Ashford Transport Study (SATS) being commissioned.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that the Senior Scrutiny Officer would need to investigate when the first SATS had taken place and who would be responsible for this function. This would be reported back to the Committee in due course.

Conningbrook Project

The Member who proposed the review be included on the tracker felt that this was an exceptional opportunity and that it was important that the project was undertaken correctly. His particular concern was for the management and integration of the water sports on the site and emphasised the importance of knowledgeable people to be in management.

A Member, who had no objection to the proposal, questioned the need for boats at the Lakes.

Fly Posting/Graffiti in the Borough

Members felt that the prevalence of fly posting/graffiti in the Borough needed to be addressed.

The Portfolio Holder for the Town Centre and the Urban Economy agreed that this needed to be looked at. He advised there were some occurrences of this happening on private land so this could create delays in the removal of posters/graffiti. He further advised of the creation of Town Centre Action Team which would assist with the removal of posters/graffiti in the Town Centre in addition to the work undertaken through the Street Cleansing Contract.

Resolved:

- That**
- (i) The following reviews be added to the Future Reviews and Report Tracker; KCC Shared Space Contract, Conningbrook Project, Fly Posting/Graffiti in the Borough**
 - (ii) The Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.**

54 Hayley Curd

The Committee wished to express its thanks and well wishes to Hayley Curd, who had administered the Meetings of the Committee for several years and would be shortly leaving the Council for pastures new.

55 Proposed Call-In

A Member questioned when a discussion would take place regarding the request for the Call-In of a Cabinet Decision that had been submitted.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that the formal request had been received prior to the commencement of the Meeting that evening. The Meeting to discuss the Call-In would be held shortly. Arrangements for the Meeting would be circulated to Members in due course.

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Kirsty Liddell:
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